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PHRASEOLOGICALLY SPEAKING: A CASE OF SALMAN RUSHDIE'S IDIOMATIC STYLE

1. Introduction

Personally speaking, my manner of looking at novelistic language has been affected in most part by first reading Salman Rushdie's *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (2000) more than a decade ago. Although it was not the first book by Rushdie that I had read and which had come to my attention, it was the first to strike me as remarkably phraseological. I saw for the first time that a writer could speak phraseologically, I could mark to what extent a writer can express himself in this fashion and I could observe how figurative a novel can be as a result. The phraseologicalness of this and other novels by Rushdie should not perhaps come as a great surprise as the writer himself treats English, that is to say all the levels of its organization, in the first place lexis, but also pronunciation, spelling, grammar (morphology and syntax) in an equally exceptional fashion. Salman Rushdie does not seem to prioritize any element in foregrounding it for stylistic, aesthetic, content-related, meaning-related reasons. And naturally it is also true for the subcategories of phraseology understood in a broad sense, as well as various types of figurative devices, that is ways of speaking indirectly. Nevertheless, idioms come across in the reader's eyes as lexical entities that are explored and exploited by the author most originally and creatively. Idioms as a special category of phraseologisms are particularly focalized, and it is not surprising considering their primary referential function, as well as their metaphorical way of referring (metaphor is used here, for the sake of simplicity, as an umbrella term for figurative language). Other phraseological units, textual and interpersonal, are also used but they are markedly less frequently utilized for

functions other than their dominant roles. On the other hand, it has been shown that idioms can be used for other untypical purposes, achieved most of the time by other types of phraseological units with different functions (Szpila 2012).

My interest in Rushdie's phraseology has been so far "limited" to proverbs and idioms (Szpila 2004, 2012) and my analyses have been prose-oriented as the many aspects of these phraseological units are best revealed in their deployment in Rushdie's novelistic language. The study of the functions of idioms in literature is claimed, however, to have been relatively neglected in comparison with the analyses of the other contextual aspects of phraseological units (cf. Christophe 1997: 17), while the literary use of phraseological units is regarded as an essential aspect of phraseological study (cf. Fleischer 1997: 226; Burger 1998: 146 ff.), and as one without which the description of phraseology is rendered incomplete (cf. Pastor 1996: 214). The employment of phraseological units in literary texts has become consequently the main subject of many phraseological analyses which address, among others, the communicative, pragmatic and stylistic aspects of phraseologisms (cf. Fernando 1996; Moon 1998; Sick 1993; Strässler 1982).

This paper is a response to the postulates that phraseology/fixed idiomaticity be studied so that a complete picture of language use in a novelistic text should emerge. To this effect I set myself here two humble aims, somehow reflected in its title. Firstly, I would like to speak of phraseo-stylistics as an approach to the description of style that focuses on phraseological units in a literary text. Secondly, I would like to briefly characterize major features of Rushdie's phraseological style as revealed by dint of phraseo-stylistic tools. In other words I would like to address two issues: *phraseologically speaking* and *speaking phraseologically*.

2. Phraseologically speaking: a phraseo-stylistic perspective on style

Phraseologically speaking, Salman Rushdie is to my mind a very phraseological writer, and very idiomatic to boot. However, to show the idiomaticity or – more generally – the phraseologicalness of his prose we have to examine it with the help of certain analytical tools, which may lead to a more exact evaluation of this mode of expression in his novels as well as other literary works. Studying the use of phraseological units in prose falls naturally under stylistics. As the lexical material of such stylistic examination is relatively well-defined as well as very rich in itself, it has been suggested that there be a separate study of phraseological units, with regard to their use in discourse, and which was given the name of phraseo-stylistics.

This is a relatively new branch of stylistics but has already been defined in its own terms (Gläser 1986, 1998; Naciscione 2001, 2010; Szpila 2012). Apart from phraseo-stylistics I have also suggested introducing paremiostylistics (a stylistic study of proverbs in discourse) as either a sub-discipline of phraseo-stylistics or a separate co-discipline with reference to stylistics (Szpila 2007).

The main idea behind phraseo-stylistics is the belief that due to their inherent features phraseological units play a significant role in the constitution of a text, in terms of, amongst others, content, text organization and stylistic effects. The description of phraseological units results from what I call phraseological reading (which includes idiomatic as well as paremic reading), and results in the characterization of the phraseo-sense of a text that is understood here as the sum total of the meanings expressed by all the idiomatic expressions forming the semantic phraseological whole.

This phraseological whole is established through an intricate network of relations between the semantics of phraseologisms and the semantics of their embedding on a micro- and macroplane. These relations operate at the lowest level of the phraseological units themselves, where the standard meanings of idioms are necessarily evoked, then at all the intermediate stages and at the uppermost level of idiomatic organization in a text. There are at least two fundamental issues which idioms at the very basic level may raise. Firstly, what must be considered is the choice of particular idioms, which are pregnant not only with specific referential meanings but also have different expressive and stylistics connotations, as well as belong to different registers (Gläser 1986: 31 ff., 1998: 127–129). Secondly, what must be taken into account as well are the forms in which idioms appear in a text, which range from canonical to highly modified, and all possible consequences these alterations bring to the formal/semantic/pragmatic effects and roles of phraseologisms. Each and every idiomatic locus is naturally bound to the embedding text as far as its semantics and formal fabric are concerned and the form and semantics of phraseologisms cannot be analyzed exclusive of the context in which they are submerged: they are natural building blocks of the meanings construed by all linguistic means. Despite the attempts to systematize the different textual uses of phraseological units (to some degree elucidating and clarifying), we must concede that they are oftentimes not sufficient as each text represents a unique environment in which idiomatic expressions operate. Moreover, phraseologisms functioning in one literary text enter into intertextual relations with phraseological units of other novels by the same author, by other writers or types of texts other than novels. By studying all these types of links we not only give a description of the inventory of idiomatic expressions frequently used and their modes of em-

ployment but we also define the meanings they typically convey, the forms in which they communicate them, and the ways in which the senses are established in search of common traits in the use of phraseologisms.

The evaluation of phraseological units is linked to the visibility of idiomatic expressions in a text. The more visible an idiom is, the easier it is to identify it in a text; the more canonical its form, the easier it is to match it with its standard and context-free interpretation. The identification is *a sine qua non* for a phraseological analysis to proceed, the failure to recognize phraseological units in the fabric of a text implies a huge loss of meanings, or in the worst-case scenario it results in literal, misconstrued and distorted senses.

There are idiomatic meanings whose interpretation is highly dependent on the recognition of idiomatic loci. The case in point is phraseological allusion, the identification of which is arguably the most arduous task in the phraseological analysis (Naciscione 2001: 99 ff.; Pajdzińska 1993: 174 ff.). Phraseological allusion is as important to the reading of a text as the reading of other less complex idiomatic loci. The following three examples demonstrate three clever uses of idiomatic allusion in Rushdie's novels:

What is the most powerful impulse of human beings in the face of night, of danger, of the unknown? – It is to run away; to avert the eyes and flee; to pretend the menace is not loping towards them in seven-league boots. It is the will to ignorance, the iron folly with which we excise from consciousness whatever consciousness cannot bear. No need to evoke the ostrich to give this impulse symbolic form; humanity is more wilfully blind than any flightless bird. (*Shame*, 199)

He has destroyed what he is not and cannot be; has taken revenge, returning treason for treason; and has done so by exploiting his enemy's weakness, bruising his unprotected heel. (*The Satanic Verses*, 466)

Raza Hyder could not have been expecting the reception he got, because he went into Iskander's room with a conciliatory smile on his face; but the moment he shut the door the cursing began, and Colonel Shuja swore that he saw wisps of blue smoke emerging from the keyhole, as if there were a fire inside, or four hundred and twenty Havana cigars all smoking at the same time. (*Shame*, 225)

Identification is vital in the process of the description of the phraseo-sense of a text, however, regardless of how rewarding in itself it occasionally may turn out, the phrase-sense has not yet been defined in the slightest. The search for phraseo-sense starts when a particular idiomatic locus is identified, when an idiomatic expression has been isolated after having been reconstructed out of the idiomatic material made accessible to the reader by dint of textual operations, which may include, for example, phraseological

frames, juxtapositions, splitting, implications and a number of other modifications that phraseologisms may undergo (cf. Fleischer 1997, 226 ff., Palm 1997, 62 ff.) This is the moment when we can proceed with the construal of meaning. This construal involves revealing the ways in which the latent potential of idiomatic expressions creates senses, showing how they perform various text functions as well as what kind of stylistic effect they produce.

Interpretation of the phraseo-sense of a particular text has to involve all the dimensions of interaction between phraseological units and a text – the phraseo-sense of a text should appear in the process of the exhaustive phraseological reading of a text. Namely, if we focus too much on the surface structure and local references of idioms, we may overlook other levels of phraseological meaning and function. On the other hand, if we look at idioms too globally, we may ignore their relevance for the immediate context. In other words an analysis of each idiom involves a search for its meaning, which may be apparent at first glance or less easily accessible. Reading the phraseological lines, even often between them, reveals all the meanings that are conveyed by the idiomatic expressions, as well as the ways these meanings are activated. As a result the overall content, function and aesthetics of a text emerge.

There is yet another reason why the phraseological approach to text reading is worth undertaking. This time it is idiom-orientated, namely, an analysis of idiomatic expressions deployed in particular ways in a particular text contributes to our understanding of phraseological units as linguistic entities. Examining texts which disclose a plethora of aspects of idioms' nature show how the semantics of a particular idiom, a group of idioms or a phraseological category can be manipulated: how idiomatic sense can be changed, extended or enriched, how literal and figurative meanings of homonymous syntagmas interact in a text and suffuse it with diverse interpretations, which functions are most often performed by idiomatic expressions, etc. Texts make us see how phraseological units disintegrate semantically into constituent units, in what way the semantics of phraseological units is dependent on the components of the latter, what meanings the components acquire in the process of semantic disintegration and constituent individualization and how and to what extent the textual meanings of phraseological units may deviate from the meanings of the base forms (cf. Naciscione 2001: 19). In the light of the above, phraseo-sense could be understood as the information about phraseological units that is obtained from the aspects unfolding in a particular text. This type of phraseological information goes beyond the confines of one text and impacts the nature of the phraseological system as well.

3. Speaking phraseologically – phraseology and Salman Rushdie

Salman Rushdie has an exceptionally phraseological style, statistically speaking. On all the 3991 pages of his novels analyzed there are 3046 actualizations of 1191 idiom types, which means that there are 0.29 idiom types per page and 0.76 idiom tokens per page. The statistical data, telltale as they may be in a text as that, the sheer numerousness of types and tokens reflect in a way the author's preferences as for the selection of lexical material, mode of conceptualization, etc, are evoked here only to demonstrate the numerical presence of idioms in Rushdie's books. I am not an advocate of this type of numerical evaluation of the authorial style in general. Phraseo-stylistic analysis is affected primarily by the way phraseological units are employed. Therefore, the mere statistics have to be complemented by a thorough examination of the contextualization of idioms in a larger novelistic context. Statistics are not necessarily a good indicator of the phraseologicalness of a novel/text or a particular author yet for another reason. Namely, so far no method of measuring the phraseological of a text has been suggested. In my analysis of Rushdie's idiomativeness I contrasted, for comparative estimation, two analyses of phraseological units in other literary works, namely, Judith Munat's (2005) examination of Henry James's novel *The Sacred Fount*. In comparison to the latter each of Rushdie's books seems idiomatically exuberant. Munat (2005: 400) identifies over 70 "idiomatic or conventional phraseological units", and that class includes idioms only as a smaller group. In a similar phraseological analysis, of Ingrid Noll's *Der Hahn ist tot*, Gorchakova (2009) counts 441 idioms and 700 actualizations (2.5 per page). It is vital to note that the author includes in her analysis such fixed expressions as, for example, 'Glück haben' ('be in luck, lucky') and 'auf keinem Fall' ('under no circumstances'), which would not be included in my study of Rushdie's novelistic idiomativeness. The phraseological (idiomatic) evaluation of a novel is subjective as it is dependent on the classificatory criteria applied in the selection of analytical material. With no clear-cut yardsticks for differentiating phraseological from non-phraseological texts, the properties of literary fabric remain of a scalar nature. Nevertheless, taking in consideration both the statistics and a more detailed assessment of his linguistic style as well Mrazović's classification of phraseological writers (1998), I would reiterate that Rushdie can be categorized as highly phraseological/idiomatic (cf. Szpila 2003, 2004, 2007, 2012).

Rushdie is not only an idiomatic writer in the strictest sense of the term, but he is also an author whose books are figurative (metaphorical), using Nash's (1980: 155) distinction of literal and non-literal narratives. In the case of Rushdie's novels phraseologicalness and non-idiomatic metaphori-

calness complement each other. The author's idiomatic style cannot then be easily divorced from his metaphorical language and in many a case it is impossible as the writer originally and creatively extends the metaphors and other figures of speech embedded already in idioms into metaphorical spaces where the distinction between the established and novel metaphorization is neatly precluded.

It is impossible to characterize all that strategies of idiom use we find in Rushdie's novels in a short exposition, not only because of a great number of actualizations of idiomatic types, but also because all of them fall in many a particularized class of use within which we encounter various ways of functionalizing of idiomatic use. All of them contribute to the constitution of the overall phraseo-sense. The following fragment is a case in point:

The emperor sighed a little; when Gulbadan started climbing the family tree like an agitated parrot there was no telling how many branches she would need to settle on briefly before she decided to rest. (*The Enchantress of Florence*, 109)

As far as the form of idioms is concerned, Rushdie shows us all possible means of structural transformation. There is not a single modification type defined in phraseology that the writer would not utilize. Some lexical changes such as substitution, addition have an impact of the dictionary senses of the idioms affected, for example: "undressed to kill" (*Fury*, 232) and "take the breaks off sth" (*The Ground Beneath her Feet*, 47); others are not so much semantic as connotative and expressive in character, for instance: "tear away your eyes" (*Midnight's Children*, 174) and "arch your eyebrows" (*The Ground Beneath her Feet*, 196). Yet others are plays on words – or better to say plays on phrases – which make use of such figures as metaphor and metonymy.

As far as meaning is concerned, Rushdie uses the inherent function of idioms, that is their referential role in creating a fictional world. That is to say, he does not manipulate the standard senses of idioms and uses them canonically structurewise. At the same time he makes the reader notice their full expressive potential and he forces him/her to exploit all of their collocations sanctioned by the context of their deployment. Moreover, he takes advantage of their polysemy, the feature that is not so typical of idioms. My examination of all his 11 novels demonstrates that without manipulating the senses of idiomatic expressions, the author resorts ambidextrously to the context to exhibit the potentiality of a canonical form to interact with other linguistic means, plot, novelistic structure on many levels.

Semantically speaking then, Rushdie may not challenge the common meanings of idioms, but he is more than aware of the inherent double coding of most idioms and refers to the fact that some idioms may be paired

with homonymous literal equivalents. This feature of some idiomatic expressions increases the number of readings of a particular idiomatic locus and enhances the richness of text interpretation, for example:

If he had had hands, he would have rubbed them. (*Grimus*, 85)

Sometimes she literally rubbed their noses in the dirt. (*The Moor's Last Sigh*, 73)

You've heard of vampires? Most of them are blood-thirsty, long-in-the-tooth, undead Aztec gods. (*Luka and the Fire of Life*, 128)

On analysing Rushdie's treatment of holistic senses of idioms it becomes apparent that the author notices and utilizes the polilexicality of idioms. He sees idioms as divisible elements, whose presence in fixed expressions is both motivated and motivatable. It happens more often than not that the writer uses not only whole idioms but their constituents for the purpose of allusion, sense individualization, and intensification of individualized constituent meaning. He treats idioms' constitutive parts as cohesive devices, for anaphoric and cataphoric references, and as elements warranting the coherence of a text by relating them to other text constituents. Apart from making good use of the established forms and the fixed meanings of idioms, he explores the motivational grounds of idioms, probes deep into their under-the-surface nature, bringing to light the structure of source domains as established by the form and sense of an idiom, which I call the *idiomatem* – a useful tool that allows to capture some important facets of idioms in action, as well as account for the nature of idioms themselves. He connects the unearthed elements, relationships, frames, schemas with the fabric of a novel.

Regardless of a strategy of idiom actualization, Rushdie uses idiomatic expressions to establish textual relations defined in terms of the relations between idiomatic loci and referents, in terms of micro- and macro-idioms for instance. He reinforces the senses by idiomatic repetition, metaphorizes text fragments, primarily by imagistic idioms themselves but also by means of extended metaphors. He uses idioms to describe the linguistic behaviour of his protagonists, to produce humorous effects, and in the process of employing them so skilfully enchants the reader.

I truly believe Rushdie's idiomatic language deserves particular attention and requires examining to assess fully his use of phraseological expressions. Nevertheless, we should also study other formulaic expressions such as proverbs, comparisons and similes, sayings, winged words, collocations and others both in his novels and non-fiction. Further individual analyses and overall interpretations will not only complement the previous studies of

Rushdie's authorial style, but also – I believe – confirm his status as a phraseologically ingenious writer.

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